



## **H1N1 (Swine Flu) Frequently Asked Questions**

**September 2, 2009**

### **Current Status**

#### **Are there H1N1 (swine flu) cases in Washington?**

Yes, there are confirmed cases in Washington State. Our department posts updates on Friday. Updates include only the number of hospitalized and fatal cases of lab-confirmed H1N1 flu in Washington. They can be found on the Department of Health Web site at [www.doh.wa.gov/swineflu](http://www.doh.wa.gov/swineflu).

#### **Where else are there H1N1 (swine flu) cases?**

There have been confirmed cases in all states in the United States, as well as in many other countries. For current information, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site at [www.cdc.gov/swineflu/investigation.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/swineflu/investigation.htm)

#### **How serious is this outbreak?**

Most countries have confirmed cases of H1N1 (swine flu). The United States continues to report the largest number of H1N1 hospitalized cases of any country worldwide; however, most people who have become ill have recovered without requiring medical treatment. This flu is similar to the seasonal flu that occurs every year in the U.S. Seasonal flu puts 200,000 people in the hospital and causes hundreds of thousands of illnesses. It does appear that the new virus is spread as easily as seasonal influenza. However, unlike seasonal flu, H1N1 virus more seriously affects those who are younger.

New cases of H1N1 are reported every week in our state, and we are now preparing for a new wave of infections during the fall/winter flu season.

#### **What is WHO pandemic alert Phase 6?**

Phase 6 is the World Health Organization's highest alert level. It indicates that multiple sustained flu epidemics are occurring in several regions worldwide. The alert level is based on the amount of flu being reported worldwide, not on the seriousness of the infections.

## **What is the government doing to protect us?**

- Local health departments are working closely with health care providers to investigate cases of influenza-like illness:
  - That leads to death or hospitalization.
  - In pregnant women.
  - In health care workers.
  - In places where outbreaks have occurred.
- Our state laboratory is testing samples for swine flu.
- Our state has access to enough antiviral medication to treat up to 25 percent of our state population.
- We are planning at the state and local levels to provide vaccine to anyone who wants to protect themselves against the virus in the fall. Vaccination is the most effective way to control the spread of flu in schools and the community.

## **Vaccine**

### **Is there a vaccine that can protect me from H1N1 (swine flu)?**

- No. There is no vaccine that can protect us against H1N1 at this time.
- The federal government has contracted with several vaccine companies to manufacture enough H1N1 flu vaccine to immunize every American.
- If you are at risk for severe influenza and are also in a group at risk for pneumococcal pneumonia, ask your health care provider about pneumococcal vaccine to prevent the complications of flu.

### **When will the H1N1 (swine flu) vaccine be available?**

We expect delivery of the first large amount of vaccine in the middle of October. Vaccine will probably be available at pharmacies, doctors' offices and other selected locations. Watch for information in your community about where vaccine is available.

### **Who will be able to get vaccinated?**

Although vaccine manufacturers are making enough vaccine for everyone in the United States, at first there may not be enough vaccine for everyone so the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has suggested that the following groups be among the first to get vaccine:

- Pregnant women.
- Caregivers and household contacts for children younger than six months of age.
- Healthcare and emergency services workers.
- Everyone from six months to 24 years of age.
- Those from 25 to 64 years of age with health conditions that put them at higher risk of complications from the flu.

### **Will H1N1 (swine flu) vaccinations be mandatory?**

No; no vaccine is mandatory. Once the vaccine is developed and tested, we will encourage people to get it but it will not be mandatory.

### **Will this year's seasonal vaccine protect me from H1N1 (swine flu)?**

No, this year's seasonal flu vaccine will not protect you from H1N1.

### **Should I get vaccinated against both seasonal flu and H1N1 (swine flu)?**

Public health officials recommend that everyone who is eligible to receive the seasonal flu vaccine should get it every year. If you are eligible to receive H1N1 flu vaccine when it is available, you should get that vaccine as well. You may be able to receive both vaccines at the same time, though the seasonal flu vaccine will be available sooner than the H1N1 vaccine.

## **H1N1 (Swine Flu) Basics**

### **How serious is H1N1 (swine flu)?**

Influenza is a respiratory illness. People who get H1N1 flu have the same symptoms as people with seasonal flu. Just like seasonal flu, however, H1N1 can lead to pneumonia, and in some cases, death.

### **What are the symptoms of H1N1 (swine flu)?**

Symptoms are similar to those for seasonal influenza. Those symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches and headache. If you have symptoms of influenza such as fever, cough and sore throat, and are at risk for severe complications of influenza (children under two years old; pregnant women; adults over 65 years old; residents of long-term care facilities; people with chronic lung, heart, kidney or liver disease; diabetes; sickle cell anemia; immunosuppression or receiving chemotherapy for cancer), you should contact your health care provider.

Anyone with fever and severe respiratory symptoms, such as shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, should contact their health care provider.

### **Will this be like the 1918 pandemic and come back stronger in the fall?**

The huge 1918 influenza pandemic resulted in many hospitalized cases and many deaths. Although it is possible that this new virus could cause as many severe illnesses and deaths as the 1918 pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organization have stated this is highly unlikely. This virus does not appear to cause as much severe illness as the 1918 virus, and today we have many more medical resources than were present in 1918. For example, the federal government is working on a vaccine to treat this flu. In addition, our hospitals are better equipped to provide care and antiviral medications are available that are effective in treating this flu. We also have improved our ability to detect and monitor disease outbreaks.

## **How Do People Get H1N1 (Swine Flu)?**

### **How do people get H1N1 (swine flu)?**

You can become infected by the H1N1 influenza virus when an infected person coughs or sneezes droplets near you and you take in the virus through your mouth, nose or eyes. You can also get the virus by touching a contaminated surface such as a countertop or doorknob, and then touching your mouth, nose or eyes.

### **Can I get H1N1 (swine flu) from eating pork, ham, etc.?**

Although this virus has genes from influenza viruses that infect pigs and poultry and this virus is often called “swine flu,” this H1N1 influenza virus is spread person-to-person. You cannot get H1N1 virus by eating animal products.

### **How long can the virus live on a countertop or other surface?**

The virus can live on hard surfaces for at least several hours and possibly more than a day. For that reason, it is important that you wash your hands after coughing or sneezing to avoid passing on the virus.

- For information on cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, see [www.doh.wa.gov/swineflu](http://www.doh.wa.gov/swineflu) - available in English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, Tagalog, large type

## **How long are people contagious?**

Infected people can infect others beginning one day before symptoms start and up to seven or more days after becoming sick. Although it is possible to pass on the flu to someone else before you know you are sick, most flu cases result from a person who has symptoms passing the virus to another person. Children, especially younger children, might potentially be contagious for longer periods.

## **How long can you be infected before getting sick (showing symptoms)?**

Not all infected people get sick but, if an infected person develops symptoms, it usually happens 1-7 days after infection.

# **Prevention and Treatment**

## **How do I avoid getting H1N1 (swine flu) or infecting others if I have the flu?**

**These actions are very simple, but they really work:**

- Get vaccinated when the vaccine is available.
- Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue in the trash after you use it and clean your hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water, especially after you cough or sneeze. Alcohol-based hand cleaners are also effective.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth. Germs spread this way.
- Try to avoid close contact with sick people; don't share glasses or eating utensils.
- Wash a sick person's laundry in hot water and dry it on high. Wear gloves or wash your hands after touching laundry.
- Stay home from work or school if you are sick.

## **Is there medication that can treat H1N1 (swine flu)?**

- We believe that antiviral medications can reduce the severity and duration of symptoms.
- The commercial names of the antivirals are Tamiflu (a pill) and Relenza (an inhaler).

- Antivirals must be prescribed by a health care professional, and should only be used to treat people who are more severely ill OR are at high risk of complications. Antivirals can be used to prevent infection in certain high-risk persons.

### **Can I use antivirals like Tamiflu and Relenza to avoid getting H1N1 (swine flu)?**

Tamiflu and Relenza should be used primarily for treatment of people with influenza. In addition, these drugs may be used in people at high risk for severe complications of illness after they are exposed to someone with influenza.

- If large numbers of people were to take these drugs for prevention, the virus may develop resistance to them and they could no longer be used to treat sick people.
- This disease outbreak could last a long time. If you took these drugs to try to avoid getting sick, you would have to take them possibly for many months.
- Antivirals must be prescribed by a health care professional, and should only be used to treat people who are ill or to prevent illness in high-risk situations.

### **Where can I get Tamiflu and Relenza?**

Antivirals must be prescribed by a health care professional, and should only be used to treat people who are ill.

### **Does the government have antivirals?**

Federal, state and local governments have supplies of antiviral drugs that they will use to resupply hospitals, doctors' offices and pharmacies to avoid any shortages.

## **What if I'm Sick?**

### **What should I do if I get sick?**

Although typical flu symptoms usually do not require medical attention, healthy adults who are not at risk for complications of flu should at least contact their doctor if they have unexplained fever and trouble breathing or if their symptoms are getting worse. If people are at risk for severe influenza or complications of influenza (see above), they should at least contact their doctor when they:

- Develop symptoms of the flu, including fever and either a cough or sore throat, OR
- Have had close contact with someone who is definitely known to have influenza.

If you become very ill with influenza-like symptoms, including fever, cough, sore throat, body aches, or symptoms of a severe cold, call your health care provider.

- NOTE – Unless you need urgent medical care, please phone rather than going directly to a doctor’s office, clinic or hospital. Your health care provider will determine whether influenza testing or treatment is needed.

If you are sick, you should stay home and avoid contact with other people as much as possible to keep from infecting others.

### **Seek urgent medical care if...**

**In children,** emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Fast breathing or trouble breathing.
- Bluish skin color.
- Not drinking enough fluids.
- Not waking up or not interacting.
- Being so irritable that the child does not want to be held.
- Flu-like symptoms improve but then return with fever and worse cough.
- Fever with a rash.

**In adults,** emergency warning signs that need urgent medical attention include:

- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath.
- Pain or pressure in the chest or abdomen.
- Sudden dizziness.
- Confusion.
- Severe or persistent vomiting.

## **Strategic National Stockpile**

### **What is the SNS (Strategic National Stockpile)?**

The SNS is a federal program that stores large amounts of emergency medications and supplies. The SNS distributes these medications and supplies to states that ask for them during emergencies.

- In our state, we distribute our SNS antivirals to local health departments based on population.

- Local governments will use SNS supplies only to re-supply pharmacies, doctors' offices and hospitals if they run out of their current supply.

### **Will there be enough antivirals for everyone?**

The CDC recommends that states have access to enough antiviral medications to treat 25 percent of their population. Our allotment from the SNS, along with supplies purchased by our state and several counties, gives us enough medication to meet that recommendation. Again, antivirals should only be used to treat people who are sick.

## **Travel**

### **How could H1N1 (swine flu) affect my travel plans?**

**You could be screened for H1N1 virus.** Many countries, including Japan and China, are screening arriving passengers to reduce the spread of H1N1. Travelers coming from the United States may be checked for fever and other symptoms of H1N1 influenza and their travel may be delayed.

**If you are sick with symptoms of influenza-like illness, you should not travel.** These symptoms include fever, cough, sore throat, body aches and headache. Some people who have been infected with this virus also have reported diarrhea along with their respiratory illness.

**Healthy people may make travel plans using only common sense precautions to protect their health during travel.**

**If you are at risk of complications from H1N1 (swine flu) and traveling to a country experiencing an H1N1 outbreak, check with your doctor before traveling.** Travelers at high risk for complications include:

- Children less than 5 years of age.
- Those who are 65 years old or older.
- Children and adolescents (less than 18 years) who are receiving long-term aspirin therapy and who might be at risk for experiencing Reye syndrome after influenza virus infection.
- Pregnant women.
- Adults and children who have chronic pulmonary, cardiovascular, hepatic, hematological, neurologic, neuromuscular, or metabolic disorders.



- Adults and children who have poor immune systems (including immunosuppression caused by medications or by HIV infection).

People in the above groups should discuss their travel plans with their doctor. Together, they should consider the H1N1 situation in their destination and the available health care options in the area. They should discuss their specific health situations and possible increased risk of traveling to the area affected by H1N1 virus transmission.

## School and day care

### **How do I know when I should keep my child home from school or daycare?**

Does your child have a fever (100° F or 37. 7°C)? If you don't have a thermometer, feel your child's skin with your hand. If it is much warmer than usual your child probably has a fever.

Does your child have a sore throat, cough, body aches, vomiting or diarrhea?

If you answered "yes" to either question, your child could have the flu. Keep your child home from school for at least 24 hours after his or her temperature returns to normal without the use of fever reducing drugs such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen. If your child never had a fever, you should keep your child home for 24 hours after symptoms have stopped.

## Masks

### **Should I buy masks? Should I wear a mask?**

Wearing a mask does not guarantee that you will be protected from the H1N1 virus. You will be much better protected if you wash your hands frequently and avoid sick people. In areas with confirmed cases of H1N1, if you are at risk for severe flu, avoid crowds and stay at least six feet from those who are coughing and sneezing.

Wearing a mask when you are ill and coughing can reduce your ability to give the infection to someone else.

## What kind of mask works best?

Masks are usually disposable, certified by the FDA and labeled as surgical, dental, medical procedure, isolation or laser masks. If properly used, they should stop influenza transmission due to the droplets resulting from an infectious sneeze or cough.

Wear a **mask** when close contact with an infectious person is unavoidable—for example, if you must care for a sick person such as a family member with a respiratory infection.

In some settings, nurses, doctors and other health care providers wear a **respirator**. Respirators are not necessary for the general public; however, if you are suctioning or giving nebulizer treatments to someone with flu at home, you should consider wearing a respirator.

A respirator should be labeled N95 or higher by the U.S. National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH).

Make sure that your face mask or respirator fits snugly on your face. Be sure to dispose of used masks or respirators and wash your hands after touching or taking off your mask.

## Cleaning and Disinfecting

### Cleaning and disinfecting surfaces:

- Keep hard surfaces like kitchen countertops, tabletops, desktops and bathroom surfaces clean and disinfected.
- Frequently clean and disinfect surfaces touched often by more than one person—for example, doorknobs, refrigerator door handles and microwaves.
- Use disposable sanitizer cloths or disinfectant on a towel to wipe electronic items that are touched often, such as phones, computers, remote controls and hand-held games.

### When surfaces are not visibly dirty

- Clean the surface with a commercial product that is both a detergent (cleans) and a disinfectant (kills germs).

### When surfaces are visibly dirty

- Wash the surface with a general household cleaner (soap or detergent), rinse with water and follow with a disinfectant.

More cleaning information: [http://www.doh.wa.gov/swineflu/docs/cleanfact\\_en.pdf](http://www.doh.wa.gov/swineflu/docs/cleanfact_en.pdf)

## Other Questions

### Can my pet get H1N1 (swine flu)?

Currently, there is not enough information to fully assess the health implications of this novel strain of flu virus for animals. There is no evidence at this time that swine in the United States are infected with this flu virus strain.

- It is very unlikely that dogs, cats or horses would become infected with this virus.
- It may be possible for a pet monkey (nonhuman primate) and for pet swine and ferrets to become infected with this new virus from a human. For more information on how to protect your pet swine, please visit the following Web sites:

#### More information:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)
- The National Pork Board Web site also provides related information for pork producers or commercial swine owners: [www.pork.org](http://www.pork.org)

### Can I get H1N1 (swine flu) from drinking water?

No, you can't catch the virus from drinking properly disinfected tap water, even if the water was originally drawn from a source that had been in contact with infected people or animals. Since groundwater sources are not exposed to the virus, water from wells or springs, even if not disinfected, would not directly lead to an infection.

However, drinking water cups or glasses used by people who have been diagnosed as having, or show symptoms of, the flu **should not be used by others**.